

**Lectionary Readings:** Job 4:1; 5:6-27 or  
 Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 4: 11-31  
 Psalm 66: 1-9 (10-20)  
 Romans 15: 14-29  
 Luke 10: 25-37

This week, you will note, there is a choice of “Old Testament” readings – one from Job, the other from ‘Sirach’ or ‘Ecclesiasticus’ in the Apocrypha.

Looking through the Lectionary, readings from Job do not appear frequently among those set for the principal service each Sunday. In Year B, the OT reading for the “continuous” service only comes from Job on four occasions – the 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> Sundays in Ordinary Time. Isolated readings from Job are set for two other “principal (related)” services – Year B, 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time and Year C, 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.

In an introduction to the **theme and message** of Job, the NIV Study Bible states:

The book provides a profound statement on the subject of theodicy (the justice of God in light of human suffering). But the manner in which the problem of theodicy is conceived and the solution offered (if it may be called that) is uniquely Israelite. The theodicy question in Greek and later western thought has been: how can the justice of an almighty God be defended in the face of evil, especially human suffering – and, even more particularly, the suffering of the innocent? In this form of the question, three possible assumptions are left open: (1) that God is not almighty, (2) that God is not just (that there is a “demonic” element in his being) and (3) that man may be innocent. In ancient Israel, however, it was indisputable that God is almighty, that he is perfectly just and that no human is wholly innocent in his sight. These three assumptions were also fundamental to the theology of Job and his friends.

For those not familiar with the story of Job and his ‘comforters’, reading from the beginning of the book will set the scene:

#### **Prologue**

<sup>1</sup> In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. <sup>2</sup> He had seven sons and three daughters, <sup>3</sup> and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

<sup>4</sup> His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup> When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, ‘Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ This was Job’s regular custom.

#### **Job’s First Test**

<sup>6</sup> One day the angels<sup>[a]</sup> came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan<sup>[b]</sup> also came with them. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’

Satan answered the LORD, ‘From roaming throughout the earth, going to and fro on it.’

<sup>8</sup> Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.’

<sup>9</sup> ‘Does Job fear God for nothing?’ Satan replied. <sup>10</sup> ‘Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. <sup>11</sup> But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.’

<sup>12</sup> The LORD said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.’

Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

#### **Footnotes**

- a. Job 1:6 Hebrew *the sons of God*
- b. Job 1:6 Hebrew *satan* means *adversary*.

Later in the chapter we read of the four disasters that fall on Job – (1) his 500 yoke of oxen and 500 donkeys carried off in a Sabean attack, his servants killed; (2) fire falling from the sky, burning 7000 sheep and the servants who were tending them; (3) Chaldean raiders carrying away his many camels, again killing the servants and (4) the final ‘straw’, a ‘mighty’ wind causing the house to collapse on and kill his seven sons and three daughters.

Moving on to the beginning of chapter 2 we further read:

#### **Job’s Second Test**

<sup>1</sup> On another day the angels<sup>[a]</sup> came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. <sup>2</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’

Satan answered the LORD, ‘From roaming throughout the earth, going to and fro on it.’

<sup>3</sup> Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.’

<sup>4</sup> ‘Skin for skin!’ Satan replied. ‘A man will give all he has for his own life. <sup>5</sup> But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.’

<sup>6</sup> The LORD said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.’

<sup>7</sup> So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.

#### Footnotes

a. [Job 2:1](#) Hebrew *the sons of God*

From verse 11 of chapter 2 Job’s three friends come on the scene:

<sup>11</sup> When Job’s three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathise with him and comfort him. <sup>12</sup> When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognise him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. <sup>13</sup> Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

Eventually Job speaks and “*curses the day of his birth*”. He pours out his feelings, bemoaning his fate, in the 26 verses of chapter 3. It is clear that Job is in despair – A footnote, (for 3:3; “*May the day of my birth perish*”) in the NIV Study Bible has:

“Job’s very existence, which has been a joy to him because of God’s favour, is now his intolerable burden. He is as close as he ever will come to cursing God, but he does not do it.”

He concludes his speech recorded in those 26 verses of chapter 3:

<sup>20</sup> ‘Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul,

<sup>21</sup> to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure,

<sup>22</sup> who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave?

<sup>23</sup> Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?

<sup>24</sup> For sighing has become my daily food; my groans pour out like water.

<sup>25</sup> What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.

<sup>26</sup> I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.’

That brings us to our reading for today – chapter 4, verse 1 (“*Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied*”); and 22 verses from chapter 5.

Eliphaz is one of the three ‘friends’ or as we better know them ‘comforters’ of Job. His reply to Job is quite long and we pick it up in chapter 5:

<sup>6</sup> For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground.

<sup>7</sup> Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upwards.

<sup>8</sup> **‘But if I were you, I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause before him.**

He continues by outlining some of the ‘wonders’ and ‘miracles’ of God that are beyond human comprehension until in verse 16 he says:

<sup>16</sup> So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth.

He then goes on:

<sup>17</sup> ‘Blessed is the one whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.

(The Hebrew word, frequently translated as Almighty is *Shaddai*).

<sup>18</sup> For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.

<sup>19</sup> From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will touch you.

<sup>20</sup> In famine he will deliver you from death, and in battle from the stroke of the sword.

The next 7 verses are ‘promises to Job’ of what the Lord can do – each begins with the words “*You will ....*” There is even a ‘promise’ of more (replacement?) children:

<sup>25</sup> You will know that your children will be many, and your descendants like the grass of the earth.

The reading concludes with a verse of great confidence expressed by Eliphaz, for Job and also for us today:

<sup>27</sup> **‘We have examined this, and it is true. So hear it and apply it to yourself.’**

Ecclesiasticus/Sirach belongs to the Wisdom Literature classification Scriptures from Old Testament times. The Oxford Bible Commentary on the Apocrypha, in its introduction to this book describes its title and its author:

The book of Ben Sira is known by various names in Jewish and Christian tradition. The Greek manuscripts usually provide a title at the beginning and again at the end: “*The Wisdom of Jesus, son of Sirach*”. The Latin is similar: “*The Book of Jesus son of Sirach*”. The beginning of the book does not exist in Hebrew but fragments of documents found at the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo refer to the book as “*The Wisdom of Simon son of Eleazar son of Sira*”. The name Simon is probably introduced by mistake, because of the praise of the high priest Simon in chapter 50. The author’s grandson, who translated the book into Greek, refers to his illustrious ancestor as ‘my grandfather Jesus’. The full name was presumably Jeshua ben Eleazar ben Sira. The “ch” in the form Sirach derives from the Greek Sirachides, son or grandson of Sira, and so the Greek and Latin ‘son of Sirach’ is redundant: here we will use Ben Sira or Sirach.

In many manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate the book is simply called ‘Ecclesiasticus’ or ‘church book’. The medieval Jewish commentator Saadia calls it ‘*The Book of Instruction*’.

The whole of our reading today is devoted to “Wisdom” – from verses 20 to 31 we can see why Saadia described it as ‘*The Book of Instruction*’:

**(Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 4: 11-31)**

- <sup>11</sup> Wisdom raises her sons to greatness and cares for those who seek her.  
<sup>12</sup> To love her is to love life; to rise early for her sake is to be filled with joy.  
<sup>13</sup> The man who attains her will win recognition; the Lord’s blessing rests upon every place she enters.  
<sup>14</sup> To serve her is to serve the Holy One, and the Lord loves those who love her.  
<sup>15</sup> Her dutiful servant will give laws to the heathen, and because he listens to her, his home will be secure.  
<sup>16</sup> If he trusts her, he will possess her and bequeath her to his descendants.
- <sup>17</sup> At first she will lead him by devious ways, filling him with craven fears. Her discipline will be a torment to him, and her decrees a hard test until he trusts her with all his heart (*or – until she can trust him*).  
<sup>18</sup> Then she will come straight back to him again and gladden him, and reveal her secrets to him.  
<sup>19</sup> But if he strays from her, she will desert him and abandon him to his fate.
- <sup>20</sup> Watch your chance and defend yourself against wrong, and do not be over-modest in your own cause:  
<sup>21</sup> for there is a modesty that leads to sin, as well as a modesty that brings honour and favour.  
<sup>22</sup> Do not be untrue to yourself in deference to another, or so diffident that you fail in your duty.  
<sup>23</sup> Never remain silent when a word might put things right, <sup>24</sup> for wisdom shows itself by speech, and a man’s education must find expression in words.  
<sup>25</sup> Do not argue against the truth, but have a proper sense of your own ignorance.  
<sup>26</sup> Never be ashamed to admit your mistakes, nor try to swim against the current.  
<sup>27</sup> Do not let yourself be a doormat to a fool or curry favour with the powerful.  
<sup>28</sup> Fight to the death for truth, and the Lord God will fight on your side.  
<sup>29</sup> Do not be forward in your speech but slack and neglectful in your work.  
<sup>30</sup> Do not play the lion in your home or swagger (*Greek is obscure*) among your servants.  
<sup>31</sup> Do not keep your hand open to receive and close it when it is your turn to give.

The NIV Bible Commentary gives the title “**Come and See What God Has Done**” to Psalm 66. The introduction goes on to say:

This psalm is composed of two independent but related units. The first unit (vv.1-12) is a hymn, which may be further divided into two separate hymns (vv. 1-7; vv.8-12). The second unit (vv.13-20) contains an individual thanksgiving psalm.

The Daily Study Bible says of this psalm:

What a strongly “evangelical” psalm this is! The temple minister speaks first. He invites not just believing Israel, but *all the earth* (!) to make a joyful noise to God. Evidently man, the creature, is not meant to keep his praise of God tucked up in his heart. There is a missionary element in his praise. The shouting can become a form of attack against the powers of evil. It is like a Maori *haka* which a rugby team can use to scare the opposing team out of its wits before the game begins. We find it used in this way by Joshua at the siege of Jericho (Joshua 6:20). *Sing* (or better, sing to the accompaniment of a musical instrument) *the glory of his name*. As the poem proceeds, God’s glory is equated with his power. This is the equation that Paul uses in his Letter to the Romans. And God’s *name*, as we have seen, is the very essence of his being.

Reading the Daily Study Bible introduction I am reminded of the Authorised (King James) version for verse 1:

Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands:

That in its turn brings back memories of a teaching colleague who was also an Anglican Lay Reader (and an ex Olympic race walker!).

You just hoped that you didn’t end up sitting next to him in school chapel as he was ‘tone deaf’ but that didn’t stop him from singing any hymn very loudly. If challenged he would quote Psalm 66:1 – “*Make a joyful noise unto God*”.

He certainly lived up to that injunction!

The first seven verses declare God’s omnipotence – “*Come and see what God has done, his awesome deeds for mankind!*” (v.5), the next five are **more individual**.

The NIV Bible Commentary heads verses 1-7 as “Universal Praise of God’s Kingship” and verses 8-12 as “Community Praise of God’s Kingship”.

- <sup>8</sup> Praise our God, all peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard;  
<sup>9</sup> he has preserved **our** lives and kept **our** feet from slipping.  
<sup>10</sup> For you, God, tested **us**; you refined **us** like silver.  
<sup>11</sup> You brought **us** into prison and laid burdens on **our** backs.  
<sup>12</sup> You let people ride over **our** heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought **us** to a place of abundance.

The final section, verses 13-20, is one of “Individual Thanksgiving”:

- <sup>13</sup> I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfil my vows to you –  
<sup>14</sup> vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble.  
<sup>15</sup> I will sacrifice fat animals to you and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats.  
<sup>16</sup> **Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.**  
<sup>17</sup> I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue.  
<sup>18</sup> If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;

<sup>19</sup> but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer.

<sup>20</sup> Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

The NIV Study Bible, in its introductory footnote, says of this psalm:

A psalm of praise for God's answer to prayer. It seems that God has saved the author (*note, this psalm is not attributed to David*), probably a king, from an enemy threat, and his deliverance has also involved the whole nation. It has often been suggested that the psalm speaks of Judah's remarkable deliverance from the Assyrians (see 2 Kings 19).

In this section of his Letter to the Romans Paul is laying out his credentials as "*the minister to the Gentiles*" followed by his plan to visit the centre of the Empire en route for Spain.

As we consider parts of the passage that apply to us today, two sections stand out:

<sup>18</sup> I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – <sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

<sup>20</sup> It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

"*What Christ has accomplished through me ..... through the power of the Spirit of God*" – that was central to the life of Paul following his conversion on the road to Damascus.

We remember the time, recorded in Acts, when he tried to be 'clever' in discussing faith with the Athenians – taking them on in debate as was their practice. "Very interesting – we will continue the discussion another day" was the general reaction; few became followers of 'The Way'.

Contrast that with Paul writing his first letter to the Church in Corinth: (1 Corinthians 2: 1-5)

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

<sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

<sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

<sup>4</sup> **My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.**

Let us pray that in our lives we may know and be directed by the same Holy Spirit, able to experience and demonstrate his power through 'signs and wonders'.

We noted in verse 20 that Paul always aimed to take the Gospel to new ground; to avoid building on the foundations established by others. We read, again in 1 Corinthians, of tensions established within the church by the pioneering work of different 'disciples': (chapter 1)

<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you, and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

<sup>11</sup> My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

<sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: one of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.'

<sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul?

<sup>14</sup> I thank God that I did not baptise any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so no one can say that you were baptised into my name.

<sup>16</sup> (Yes, I also baptised the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptised anyone else.)

<sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Paul was not the one to establish the Christian Church in Rome and he had never been there. He did, however, have a 'human' desire to visit them and thought he would be 'permitted by the Spirit' to do so on his way to Spain:

<sup>29</sup> I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

The second section that stands out from our reading concerns Paul's travels at the time he is writing to the Romans:

<sup>25</sup> Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there.

<sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem.

<sup>27</sup> They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

<sup>28</sup> So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way.

The Christians in Macedonia and Achaia were concerned for the material condition of the Jewish Church.

We regularly offer our prayers in public worship for those in need – from the pandemic, from hunger and drought, from fire and flood; but does our concern go deeper, do we like the Macedonians and Achaiaans give of our comparative 'wealth' to bring relief in deprived areas? We are reminded again of our Church's two year project, which has just started, a call to social justice based on the Old Testament Prophet, and titled "Walking with Micah".

Luke, in our Gospel reading, recounts the time when Jesus delivered the parable of the Good Samaritan. Many times teachers of the law come to Jesus with “trick” questions. We are not told that this time – it is possible that the question “*what I do to inherit eternal life?*” was genuine.

We note that Jesus gave His normal response – “*What is written in the Law?*” “*How do you read it?*” He invariably turned the question back on the questioner, and in this case He gets the expected answer from the ‘Law’:

<sup>27</sup> He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbour as yourself.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>28</sup> ‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live.’

The teacher’s reply - “*To Love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*” is found in Deuteronomy 6:5; and “*To Love your neighbour as yourself*” in Leviticus 19:18.

Was this intended to be a “trick” question or did the teacher just feel embarrassed – he had been shown up, quoting something which every devout Jew should and probably would know! The ‘justifying’ question follows – “*And who is my neighbour?*”

Was Jesus taking a quiet ‘swipe’ at the religious authorities of the day or was he just choosing three ‘travellers’ on the Jerusalem to Jericho road who made a real contrast in the story.

We might expect the priest and the Levite to stop and help.

The priest could well have been thinking about his ‘duties’ – any help given to this injured man would surely render him ritually unclean for a period of time making it impossible to carry out his priestly duties; so he passes by on the other side.

I have heard a suggestion that the Levite was hurrying to a very important meeting – to discuss the subject of “Aid to distressed travellers”! He was far too busy to offer any help.

It was the Samaritan (people generally hating the Jews and being hated in return) who stops and gives extensive aid – not only at the roadside but by taking him to an inn and even paying for him to be looked after.

Jesus has made his point – neighbours can easily be people we do not like or who are not normally our associates. We note that when Jesus asks the teacher of the law who was the neighbour, he can’t quite bring himself to utter the words “the Samaritan”:

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’

**Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’**

That raises the question for us – Who do we treat as our neighbour?

Would you walk by on the other side,  
when someone called for aid?  
Would you walk by on the other side,  
and would you be afraid?

*Cross over the road, my friend,  
ask the Lord his strength to lend,  
his compassion has no end,  
cross over the road.*

Would you walk by on the other side,  
when you saw a loved one stray?  
Would you walk by on the other side,  
or would you watch and pray?

Would you walk by on the other side,  
when starving children cried?  
Would you walk by on the other side,  
and would you not provide?

Pamela M. Verrall (STF 257)

**The kingdom of God  
is justice and joy,**  
for Jesus restores  
what sin would destroy;  
God’s power and glory  
in Jesus we know,  
and here and hereafter  
the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God  
is mercy and grace,  
the prisoners are freed,  
the sinners find place,  
the outcast are welcomed  
God’s banquet to share,  
and hope is awakened  
in place of despair.

The kingdom of God  
is challenge and choice,  
believe the good news  
repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners  
brought Christ to his cross,  
our crisis of judgement  
for gain or for loss.

God’s kingdom is come,  
the gift and the goal,  
in Jesus begun,  
in heaven made whole;  
the heirs of the kingdom  
shall answer his call,  
and all things cry glory  
To God all in all!

Bryn Rees (STF 255)